

OBITUARY

**Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Maitland Emmet,
MBE, TD, MA, Hon. FRES, FLS**

15 July 1908 — 2 March 2001

With the death of Maitland Emmet on 3rd March 2001, Britain has lost one of the greatest microlepidopterists of the twentieth century. Nobody working in that field in the British Isles could be unaware of the massive contribution that he made to the study of the British and Irish fauna, and of the debt they owed him. His tireless energy and his willingness to guide and instruct others on the identification, life histories and distribution of these too-little-known species endeared him to many and inspired a whole generation of lepidopterists.



Plate F. Maitland Emmet, with his late wife Katie, searching for leaf mines at Friday Woods, Essex in 1992.

Photograph © Brian Goodey

Maitland Emmet was the youngest child of an Oxfordshire parson, a classical scholar and academic who went on to be Chaplain of University College, Oxford, until his premature death in 1923. Maitland's own career was conventional for someone of his background and education. Indeed, until he was well over 50 years old, he gave no indication that he was to take up the study of microlepidoptera and become a leading authority. This large

and most difficult group of Lepidoptera species was generally neglected by amateurs. However, because of his longevity – his mother, aunt and two sisters have all lived into their nineties – he had ample time to apply his powerful intellect to their study, and he used it with great effect, observing critically and describing with precision and in masterly prose what he had observed.

From early childhood, he showed great interest in butterflies and moths and is still remembered by his elder sister Margery as a small boy out in the fields with his net. This interest was somewhat latent while he was at school, where he was academically bright, winning prizes in English, divinity and mathematics, and where he learnt Latin and Greek, the subjects he went on to read at University College, Oxford. It remained with him throughout his life though taking second place in earlier years, perhaps because he had not yet discovered a sufficient intellectual challenge in the subject. At Oxford he rowed – a sport in which he excelled – though just failed to win his blue. After university, in 1931, he went on to become an English master at St Edward's School, Oxford, where once again rowing occupied his out-of-classroom hours as he coached the school's crew to become one of the best on the river. Wartime with the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry provided a few occasions of entomological pleasure. From his defensive position on the Isle of Wight coast at the beginning of the war he enjoyed watching Glanville Fritillaries flying past. Later in India he found time to watch and collect butterflies, though in Burma, where he was a senior liaison officer with the rank of major, the fighting precluded much serious natural history, though at times it no doubt provided a necessary and welcome diversion. He was made MBE for his official history of the Arakan campaign of the 25th Indian Division in which he served.

After the war he returned to teaching in Oxford, and, in 1947, joined the Amateur Entomologists' Society, thus giving more focus to his renewal of interest. This must have encouraged him to produce the second supplement to the list of microlepidoptera, published in 1948 by the Ashmolean Natural History Society to which he no doubt also belonged. It is clear that, like so many other lepidopterists, he had yet to take up the study of the smaller moths. In 1951, his first contribution to the *Bulletin* of the AES was on the subject of common wing-patterns in otherwise divergent tropical butterflies, based on his experience in India. Another contribution, in May 1965, was on the subject of the communal roosting habits of butterflies, clustering together in a disused wartime pillbox. However, through his membership of the AES and stimulated by the notes on the smaller moths, which from 1963 were illustrated by fine line drawings from the pen of Eric Bradford, a keen interest in microlepidoptera was aroused. A note on parasitisation, published in the *Entomologist's Record* in 1966, refers to his searching for mines as early as 1960, but these were of the clearwing *Synanthedon andrenaeformis* in a wayfaring tree. However, their discovery undoubtedly sparked his

fascination in the leaf – and stem-mining Lepidoptera of micros as well as macros, as in the same account he refers to his searches for a nepticulid species which mined beech leaves.

He had retired from school-teaching in 1957 and spent a number of years living with his sister Margery in Bristol while working as an examiner for the London University Examinations Board and as a part-time selector for the RAF. In 1964 he moved permanently to Saffron Walden where his elderly mother and aunt lived, and cared for them until their deaths in 1972.

In 1965, Maitland Emmet had joined the South London Entomological and Natural History Society, a body to which many leading entomologists, both professional and amateur belonged. The following year, for the first time he mounted an exhibit at its annual exhibition, and two months previously he had published in the *AES Bulletin* collecting notes for August 1966 on “the smaller moths”, the first of many he was to contribute. He had just succeeded Mr D. Ollevant, whose previous series of notes had contained some serious editorial errors, the captions to illustrations being transposed on more than one occasion, which Emmet felt compelled to bring to light. Using courteous, well-chosen language, which nevertheless did not attempt to conceal his irritation, he wrote, “Mr E.S. Bradford must be a very aggrieved man. After executing his drawings of microlepidoptera with the greatest skill and producing one of the best features of the *Bulletin*, he seems to be dogged with error.” He added, “It is one’s duty to correct such errors. However I write only in part to find fault: doing so also gives me the opportunity to pay my tribute to Mr Bradford’s fine work.” When invited to take over, he acknowledged that he “could not refuse without meeting the opprobrium due to the destructive critic”. “I had entrapped myself”, he added. The following year, Maitland became ever more active as a microlepidopterist. At the next South London annual exhibition he displayed an impressive collection of microlepidoptera collected from the south and east of England and from Galway in Ireland. He also showed a *Mompha conturbatella* as a new species for Suffolk. During the next couple of years he led field meetings to Stoke Row, Oxfordshire, Trottscliffe, Kent, and Portland, Dorset. It was said of him that he and Stanley Howard Wakely, a microlepidopterist whom he much admired, would “often hunt in couples”. In his obituary of Wakely, written jointly in 1976 with Michael Chalmers-Hunt, he described him as a pre-eminent field worker, and there can be no doubt that his fieldcraft was passed on to his distinguished younger disciple.

He was a leading member of a number of natural history societies, serving as president of the British Entomological & Natural History Society (formerly the South London) in 1971; of the AES in 1975; and of the Essex Field Club (1985-1986). He was on the council of the Royal Entomological Society from 1978-81, being vice-president for the last two years, and was made honorary fellow in 1984. He was elected fellow of the Linnean Society in 1973.

As a scholar, in addition to being a field-worker, Maitland Emmet delved deeply into the literature. He revered Henry Tibbats Stainton, arguably the greatest British microlepidopterist of all – of whom he published an appreciation in 1992 in the *Entomologist's Gazette* on the occasion of the centenary of his death. Maitland also much admired Edward Meyrick, a classicist and schoolmaster like himself, to whose *Revised Handbook of British Lepidoptera* he would refer frequently.

In 1975, John Heath founded the ongoing series *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*, inviting Maitland Emmet to become an associate editor, a role he relished. He was also asked to contribute the account of the Nepticulidae, based on his researches into these tiny leaf-mining moths to which he had been devoting much of his spare time. He was to describe eighty per cent of the species anew, not simply copying earlier descriptions as is so often done in works of this kind. Moreover, he reared and described nearly ninety per cent of the larvae from living specimens as well as their mines from freshly gathered material. This work led to his recognition by the Zoological Society of London with the award of the Stamford Raffles medal for his scientific work as an amateur.

In 1978, Emmet became joint editor with John Heath of the series on Moths and Butterflies (*MBGBI*). On Heath's death in 1987, he took over as sole editor, meticulously editing three further volumes: 7(2) (1991), 3 (1996) and lastly Volume 4, which he had just completed at the time of his death, ably supported by John Langmaid as co-editor, and which is now being prepared for press. Covering the families from Oecophoridae to Scythrididae, it contains contributions from fifteen expert lepidopterists in addition to his own, of which the texts have been edited with his customary rigour as well as disarming charm – sometimes necessary when his red pen on a returned typescript seemed to dominate the page! The scholar and schoolmaster in him were with him to the end. It is a sadness for all who have contributed to it that he has not lived to see it published, but his memorial is his massive contribution to the work. Apart from the Nepticulidae, he was sole or co-author of two other small families in Volume 1 and of five families in Volume 2, including the Gracillariidae, which he wrote with Ian Watkinson. In Volume 3, he presented yet another major contribution: this time on the Coleophoridae – a masterpiece of accurate and descriptive writing in which he described the case-making habits of the larvae, the majority of which he wrote up from his personal observations.

Emmet was author of *The smaller moths of Essex* (1981); co-author with Geoff Pyman of *The larger moths and butterflies of Essex* (1985); and of *The scientific names of the British Lepidoptera – their history and meaning* (1991). This masterly work combined his knowledge of the classics with his profound interest in puzzling out answers to problems – in this case the often almost intractable explanations for the scientific names chosen by their

nomenclators for new species of Lepidoptera. The novelist A. S. Byatt awarded it the accolade of her “Christmas Book of the Year”, and it has already become a classic. Maitland Emmet’s contribution to the “butterfly volume”, *MBGBI* 7(1) (1989), apart from accounts of some of the butterflies based on his own knowledge and researches, is a fascinating chapter on “The vernacular names and early history of British butterflies”.

In addition to this voluminous editorial work and original writing, Maitland Emmet found time to maintain maps of the distribution of the British microlepidoptera, the material derived from personal records, from records in the literature which he always scanned methodically, from correspondence, and from excursions often with groups of regionally based lepidopterists who took him to favoured areas. He was frequently consulted on local faunal guides and wrote introductions to several of them. As if this was not enough, he was wont to relax over *The Times*, completing its crossword puzzle in about 20 minutes – a feat he maintained into his 90s.

The thread that runs through Maitland’s entomological researches is his fascination in the life histories of Lepidoptera. He was Britain’s leading expert on larval leaf-mines which he would collect and rear to the adult stages, thus gaining invaluable and often hitherto unknown information. His special contribution of a microlepidoptera chapter to the English translation of Ekkehard Friedrich’s *Breeding Butterflies and Moths*, which he edited, summarised his knowledge and is a valuable introduction to the subject. The chart in the second part of Volume 7 of the *Moths and Butterflies* is a condensed synthesis of what is known of the life histories of the whole of the British Lepidoptera – some 2500 species – which he compiled single-handed. He also revised and edited two editions of *A field guide to the smaller British Lepidoptera* ([1979] and 1988) – often termed the microlepidopterists’ vademecum.

He maintained a specimen collection, including a herbarium of leaf-mines, but his attitude to collecting was clear. It should not be for its own sake but for greater understanding of the species themselves. One’s main interests should be in their life histories, distribution and conservation.

Maitland remained unmarried until late middle age. His mother, at whose house in Saffron Walden he lived from 1964, died in 1972 when he was aged 64. Later that year he married Katie Tinne, the widow of a great Oxford rowing friend with whose family in Galway he used to stay in the 1960s and ’70s, and from where he recorded many species of micro. Katie was to prove not only a loyal and devoted wife; she was also a constant companion and eagle-eyed help in his search for leaf-mines, especially during the years he was preparing his contributions to *MBGBI*. He rarely went anywhere without her. When she died in 1993, after 21 years of very happy marriage, he was heartbroken.

Maitland Emmet was a tall, well-built man with a great sense of humour. He enjoyed life to the full and nothing gave him more pleasure after a day in

the field than a pint or two of beer at a nearby pub with his friends. The hospitality provided by Maitland and Katie, particularly his bumpers of sherry, was legendary. Their knockabout verbal banter was a source of astonishment not to say mystification to those who had not met them before but it concealed deep affection. As his publisher, I myself enjoyed my many visits to Labrey Cottage over the years as well as his stays at our home where stimulating conversation was lubricated with generous amounts of alcohol. His capacity was truly phenomenal but his brain remained unclouded! Much work was done in the most congenial possible way. We will all miss Maitland greatly. Perhaps his epitaph should be, in the words of Virgil: *Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas* (Happy is he who has been able to understand the causes of things).

Basil Harley
19 March 2001

Juniper Carpet *Thera juniperata* (L.)(Lep.: Geometridae) in Juniper Valley, Aston Upthorpe, Oxfordshire

I am pleased to report that Ron Louch and I recorded a fully-grown caterpillar of the Juniper Carpet moth during a visit we made to Juniper Valley, Aston Upthorpe, on 7 September 2000. This is the first time that Ron and I have visited the site together since the late 1970s, when we made a number of visits at different times of the year and recorded larvae of the Juniper Carpet and other wildlife interest. It is good to be able to confirm that the species is still present in this new millennium. Ron informs me that he also noted larvae in 1998. The site is a chalk valley with many bushes of wild Juniper *Juniperus communis*. We beat just a single Juniper bush and obtained the distinctive larva, with its red side-stripes, almost immediately. The larva was filmed on video before being returned to the bush. Formerly considered Nationally Notable, the Juniper Carpet is now widely established on cultivated junipers in gardens (see Waring, 1992. On the current status of the Juniper Carpet moth *Thera juniperata*. (Lep: Geometridae). *Ent. Rec.* **104**: 143-148), but records from native Juniper sites remain valuable records of conservation interest. I believe the site was one of those monitored for juniper-dependent insects by Lena Ward (1977. The conservation of juniper: the fauna of foodplant island sites in southern England. *J. Applied Ecol.* **14**: 121-135), but am not clear how much invertebrate recording has taken place there recently. Other noteworthy records from this visit include a Clouded Yellow butterfly *Colias croceus*, in what proved to be a good season for this migrant, and a pair of Buzzards *Buteo buteo* which appeared to be resident.—
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